



# DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

## INFORMATION SERVICE

### FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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A month of prime fishing weather plus other acts of nature combined in 1941 to give United States citizenry, soldiers and sailors, and the salmon industry their biggest break in years when needed.

Alaska came through with its highest pack since 1936; and, with the books balanced, '41 shows as the year of the Big Salmon Run on the Columbia River, where September saw the greatest fall pack in the history of its canning activities reports of the Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Department of the Interior, reveals. Canned salmon is recognized as a prime war food resource used by both the United States Army and Navy and also sent under the Lend-Lease program to feed Britain.

The unparalleled September 10-20 catch of 8 million pounds of salmon almost swamped the industry on the reaches of the Columbia. With first reliable final figures now in, the Columbia pack stands at 406,635 full cases, 67 percent chinooks, and 20 percent chum. This compares with last year's pack of 397,522 cases, the bulk of them of chinook salmon, also; and with 1918, the year of the highest all-time pack of 591,381 cases. This latter, however, consisted mainly of spring, not fall, run salmon.

Significant high record counts of chinook salmon escapement at Bonneville Dam before the September fishing season opened this year indicated the run would probably have a week to go instead of the normal or average two or three days. Usually, at the end of this time, all but a few hardy winter fishermen take in their gear and call it a season. Increasing troll catches of salmon reported along Washington and Oregon coasts during the latter days of August were also indicative factors of the big runs to come, according to Service officials.

Escapement records of adult salmon counted over Bonneville Dam fishways to the spawning grounds this year indicated that 338,275 chinook salmon cleared the dam during the September 1-20 period. This is a 41 percent increase over September 1940, the previous high month since records have been kept.

The regular fall run of salmon was apparently just entering the river on September 10, opening day of the season, and the tail end of the August run was only then clearing the dam.

It was this condition, with fish abounding the full 200-mile fishing stretch of the Columbia, and a whole month of excellent weather, which made the total receipts so heavy. Over 8,000,000 pounds were taken in the September 10-20 period inclusive, or about 80 percent of an entire normal season's catch. Both the fair weather and an exceptional quality salmon held out for the entire month, and fishing was conducted on virtually a 24-hour basis.

Geared to more normal runs, the industry was able to take the vast run in its stride, however. Practically every cannery on the river established new production records, in spite of heavy transportation problems which confronted them.

Barges, deep-sea fishing vessels, and all available trucks were counter-manded, and operated day and night between canneries and stations. All fishing boats staggered into port loaded to the "Gunnels" with record catches. There was such shortage of all hands that pleas for help were sent clear to Portland and Hoquiam. Old-time cannery workers, retired fishermen, deputy sheriffs, CCC workers, soldiers on furlough, postal and grocery clerks, business and newspapermen, whole staffs from oil companies, and even townspeople pitched in. Draftees and experts worked 36 hours straight out of the first 48 the two initial days of the run.

Fishery biologists, under whose supervision the counting work on the Columbia is carried on warned that this year's catch did not establish a "big cycle" year and said:

"While the catches in September were very large they cannot be taken at their face value as an indication of a tremendous increase in the total number of fish that escape for spawning purposes. Indeed, the effects of the commercial fishery may well level off the peaks of natural production by cutting heavily into the spawning reserve and thus reducing the population in the following cycle to the more normal proportions of a mediocre year. Of course, there is an intensive fishery above Bonneville Dam which will reduce still further the number of fish which might reach the tributary spawning grounds.

"Hence, there is little reason for extreme optimism that the run of 1941 will establish a big-year cycle which will recur in 1945, 1949, and so on. Indeed, from the standpoint of building up the chinook runs in the Columbia River to such conditions of heavy production as were experienced from 1880 to 1920, the heavy catches of the present year may be regarded as a calamity, for the one thing above all others that the Columbia River needs is more spawning fish.

"It is, of course, a great satisfaction to everyone, especially at a time when the demands for canned salmon are so extreme and so important from a national standpoint, that such a large harvest was made from the Columbia River. From the point of view of future stability of this resource, however, the escapement of fish passing Bonneville Dam assumes great importance."

But, as Service experts pointed out, while the Columbia River fall pack has been remarkable for that district, in actual volume it is only a minor factor in the total United States production of somewhere near 7½ million cases, and will have little effect on the general situation.

It does, however, relieve to some extent the existing shortage of high-grade salmon. Large portions of this shortage, of course, are represented in heavy military use, and in purchases and shipments by the Surplus Marketing Administration for domestic distribution and under the Lend-Lease program. Between March 15, 1941, and December 3, 1941, these purchases, and those for future delivery, amounted to about 4,066,540 standard cases. Shipments to Great Britain from April 29 up to November 1, under the Lend-Lease program, amounted to about 685,392 standard cases. Both purchases and shipments were of canned fish of all kinds, but mainly of sardines and salmon.

Our Army and Navy combined (as of October 1) were consuming fresh and canned fish at a rate scheduled to total 27,181 tons during 1941--and 43 percent of this was canned salmon and sardines.

Adding to the picture of an all-'round prosperous salmon year is the pack of 326,750 standard cases (as of November 15) from the Puget Sound area. British Columbia's pack went high, also, with 2,233,423 standard cases (as of November 22) according to the Chief Supervisor of Fisheries in Vancouver.

For Alaska the figures are again rosy. On October 25, the Alaska salmon pack amounted to 6,865,463 standard cases, and is the greatest since 1936, when 8,274,429 cases were packed to the corresponding date. While the red salmon pack was only about one-half that of recent years, the pink salmon pack surpassed all records with 4,620,000 cases, about 75,000 cases over the previous record in 1936. The pack of silver salmon was 85 percent above the average pack during the 6-year period from 1935 to 1940. Canned salmon prices for 1941 remained well above last year as reported by the Service's Market News office in Seattle.

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